

# Overview

## Introduction

The NM PreK Observational Assessment Tools provide a framework to guide educators in their efforts to authentically assess children's learning and to make informed decisions about curriculum. They reflect a growing consensus among early childhood professionals that a greater emphasis be placed on young children's conceptual learning, social and emotional development, and participation in relevant and meaningful learning experiences.

The State of New Mexico has established comprehensive learning outcomes to address important values for young children which recognize the unique diversity of the state. A critical part of the assessment process is the implementation of strategies to ensure consistent assessment by PreK teachers across the state.

After viewing this section, you will be able to describe:

- the NM PreK Observational Assessment Tools;
- the importance of observational assessment;
- the role of learning domains, outcomes, and indicators in the assessment process; and
- the benefits and cautions when using an assessment system based on learning outcomes.



## PreK Assessment Process

The New Mexico PreK Assessment process involves observation, documentation, and curriculum planning based on learning outcomes in 7 interdependent domains:

- physical development, health and well-being
- literacy
- numeracy
- aesthetic creativity
- scientific conceptual understandings
- self, family and community, and
- approaches to learning.

Behavioral indicators for progress toward these outcomes have been identified, and teachers are asked to observe children's progress in activities and daily routines with these indicators in mind.

Teachers record these observations in a variety of ways - notes, checklists, forms, and portfolios, noting each child's progress toward indicators.

The assessment process influences curriculum planning to meet children where they are and to help them progress.



---

## New Mexico's Approach

New Mexico's Observational Assessment incorporates PreK Early Learning Outcomes, indicators of those outcomes, and Focused Portfolio Collections.

28 Early Learning Outcomes guide curriculum planning for a high quality PreK program.

65 indicators have been established to help observers identify progress toward outcomes.

New Mexico's PreK Observational Assessment requires teachers to focus on only 23 of these indicators, called Essential Indicators.

Selected essential indicators are documented in portfolios and shared twice a year with families.



---

## Observational Assessment

Observational Assessment is...

- on-going – embedded in everyday activities and routines,
- criterion-based – observation for identified outcomes or standards,
- documented/recorded as close to the time it occurs as possible,
- objective and descriptive, not interpretive, evaluative or judgmental,
- used to determine what's been learned, to improve teaching and to support the child's progress.

Sometimes, the terms “assessment” and “evaluation” are misunderstood.

Assessment is the process of gathering and documenting information. Evaluation is the process of making judgments about that information.

Sometimes, the terms “assessment” and “test” are misunderstood. Information from a test may contribute to the assessment process, along with teacher observations, parent interviews, and portfolios.



---

## Benefits and Cautions

Using observational, outcomes-based assessment has many benefits. It reinforces the potential for learning and growth and the value of providing quality early childhood programs for children's long-term success in school and in life.

It establishes expectations for PreK children and creates a commonality for communication about children's accomplishments and capabilities.

It also provides a framework for accountability.

However, outcomes-based assessment can lead to teaching in a “cookie-cutter style” – not recognizing the uniqueness of each child and the values and cultural aspects of each community.



It can lead to teaching through direct instruction only, rather than through exploratory play, active-learning activities, large and small group times and daily routines.

It can result in the use of inappropriate assessment methods, such as testing or one time, on-demand tasks.

And, assessment strategies require adequate time for reflection and interaction among colleagues.

But, with proper training, teachers realize the approach makes sense, provides clear direction for curriculum, and encourages communication with parents.

In NM PreK, the focus is on children's success rather than failure.

---

## NM Developmental Continuum

In addition to identified outcomes for four year olds in New Mexico PreK programs, a developmental continuum has been designed to identify reasonable expectations for children's growth in all areas from birth through kindergarten.

This continuum is a valuable resource for teachers when children are performing below the PreK level or are exceeding the four year old indicators. It is hoped that this continuum will allow for greater communication across programs serving young children throughout the state, creating a common language for providing services that best meet the needs of each child.

